Amend claims 1, 8, 9, 19, 21 and 22 as follows:

1. (Amended) An optically pure [enantiomeric] compound comprising a magnesium [Na^+, Mg^{2+}, Li^+, K^+, Ca^{2+} or $N^+(R)_4$] salt of [(+)-5-methoxy-2-[[(4-methoxy-3,5-dimethyl-2-pyridinyl)methyl]sulfinyl]-H-benzimidazole or] (-)-5-methoxy-2-[[(4-methoxy-3,5-dimethyl-2-pyridinyl)methyl]sulfinyl]-H-benzimidazole [, where R is an alkyl with 1-4 carbon atoms].

8. (Amended) The process according to claim 38, [7] wherein the diastereomers are separated by chromatography or fractional crystallization.

9. (Amended) The process according to claim 38, [7] wherein [the] solvolysis is performed in alkaline solution comprising [consisting of] a base in a protic solvent [comprising alcohol or water;] or a base in an aprotic solvent [, such as dimethylsulfoxide or dimethylformamide].

19. (Amended) A pharmaceutical composition comprising the [an] optically pure enantiomeric compound according to claim [the claims] 1 as active ingredient and a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier.

21. (Amended) A method for inhibiting gastric acid secretion comprising administration ~~to a~~ mammal [including man] in need of such treatment an effective amount of the [an] optically pure compound according to claim 1.

22. A method for the treatment of gastrointestinal inflammatory diseases comprising administration to a mammal [including man] in need of such treatment an effective amount of the [an] optically pure compound or salt thereof according to claim 1 [claims 1 or 2].

Add new claims 35-42:

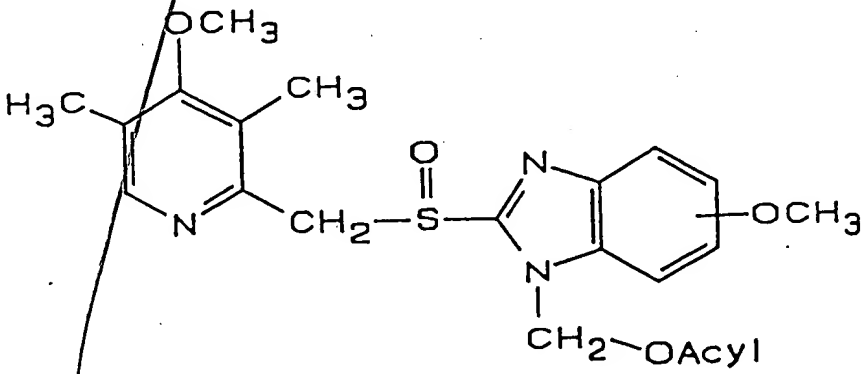
35. The compound according to claim 1 wherein the compound is in its crystalline form.

36. The compound 6-methoxy-2-[[(4-methoxy-3,5-dimethyl-2-pyridinyl)-methyl]-(R/S)-sulfinyl]-1-[(R)-mandeloyloxymethyl]-1H-benzimidazole.

37. The compound 6-methoxy-2-[[(4-methoxy-3,5-dimethyl-2-pyridinyl)-methyl]-(R/S)-sulfinyl]-1-[(S)-mandeloyloxymethyl]-1H-benzimidazole.

38. A process for the preparation of the optically pure compound according to claim 1 which comprises the steps:

(a) separating a diastereomeric mixture of an ester of formula IV



(IV)

to obtain the two diastereomers from the mixture, wherein Acyl designates a chiral acyl group having either R or S configuration;

(b) dissolving the diastereomer comprising the (-)-enantiomer of 5-methoxy-2-[[(4-methoxy-3,5-dimethyl-2-pyridinyl)methyl]sulfinyl]-1H-benzimidazole in an alkaline solution wherein the acyloxymethyl group is hydrolyzed off to give the to give the optically pure (-)-enantiomer of 5-methoxy-2-[[(4-methoxy-3,5-dimethyl-2-pyridinyl)methyl]sulfinyl]-1H-benzimidazole; and

(c) converting the optically pure (-)-enantiomer to the magnesium salt.

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39. The process according to claim 38, wherein the chiral acyl group is mandeloyl.

40. The process according to claim 9, wherein the protic solvent is selected from the group consisting of one or more alcohol and water, and wherein the aprotic solvent is dimethylsulfoxide or dimethylformamide.

41. The process according to claim 38, wherein the magnesium salt is obtained by treating the optically pure (-)-enantiomer with a base comprising magnesium in non-aqueous solution.

42. The process according to claim 38, wherein the magnesium salt of the optically pure (-)-enantiomer is obtained by first converting the optically pure (-)-enantiomer to a sodium salt and then treating the sodium salt with an aqueous solution of an inorganic magnesium salt to precipitate the magnesium salt of the optically pure (-)-enantiomer.

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